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## BISHOP MATTHEW SIMPSON AND THE FUNERAL OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

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The publication of the "Recollections of the Assassination and Funeral of Abraham Lincoln" by Edmund Beall,<sup>1</sup> in one of the recent issues of the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* has led me to believe that the readers of the *Journal* might be interested in Bishop Matthew Simpson and his funeral oration over the body of Lincoln, delivered in Springfield, Illinois, May 4th, 1865.

Abraham Lincoln, though a member of no church, had been a regular attendant on the services of the Presbyterian church, both during his residence at Springfield and at Washington, and it might have been naturally supposed that a Presbyterian minister would have been asked to deliver the principal address at the grave. But as a matter of fact, Rev. Dr. Matthew Simpson, one of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, then living in Philadelphia,<sup>2</sup> was requested to render this honored service. This request was a very natural one, especially to those who were familiar with the intimacy which had existed between the dead President and this Methodist Bishop.

Just before and during the war, Bishop Simpson and Lincoln had become well acquainted, and fast friends, Bishop Simpson being frequently summoned to Washington by Mr. Lincoln for the purpose of consultation.<sup>3</sup> Bishop Thomas Bowman,<sup>4</sup> who is still living in East Orange, New Jersey, now a very old man, and who was chaplain of the United States Senate during the latter part of the war, tells of one occasion when he and several friends were conversing with Mr. Lincoln in the White House,

<sup>1</sup> "Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society," Jan. 1913, pp. 488-492.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Simpson had lived in Evanston, Illinois until the last years of the war.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Bishop Simpson*, G. R. Crooks, pp. 370-371.

<sup>4</sup> Both Bishop Simpson and Bowman, are ex-presidents of DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana. Bishop Simpson having been the first president.

when unexpectedly the door opened and in came Bishop Simpson. The President raised both arms and started for the Bishop, and on reaching him grasped both hands and explained: "Why Bishop, how glad I am to see you!"<sup>1</sup> Later the two retired for a private interview, where they spent several hours together. Dr. Bowman further states that he later learned that Bishop Simpson had been specially summoned to Washington by the President, for this interview.<sup>2</sup>

Before his election to the Episcopacy, Bishop Simpson had been editor of "The Western Christian Advocate" published in Cincinnati, and in his editorials he had discussed vigorously "Clay's Compromise measure of 1850," and other public questions, taking what became the Republican point of view, and had thereby won the confidence of Mr. Chase. Bishop Simpson was also very friendly with Mr. Stanton, who came from a staunch Methodist family, and when the Bishop was in Washington, he almost invariably called at the War Department. In 1863, Stanton asked the Bishop to serve on a commission to visit Fortress Monroe, Newbern, Port Royal and New Orleans, to examine the condition of the colored people, and make suggestions, the Secretary saying that he wanted three men apart from politics to perform this service. But this position the Bishop declined. In the same letter in which Bishop Simpson communicates these facts to his wife, he also states that he "called on Mr. Lincoln this morning" and he was "very friendly."<sup>3</sup>

Another reason, besides the friendly relationship which existed between President Lincoln and the Bishop, which was no doubt influential in deciding the family and the Cabinet to request the Bishop's services at the President's funeral, was the fact that he was one of the most eloquent preachers in the country, and had performed a great service during the war, by means of his eloquent sermons and lectures on patriotic subjects. During the four years of the war he had gone up and down the North, preaching to great congregations, and delivering his great lecture on "Our Country," which everywhere aroused the greatest patriotic enthusiasm, often bringing whole audiences to their feet by the power of his eloquence.

<sup>1</sup> Life of Bishop Simpson, Crooks, p. 272.

<sup>2</sup> For other testimony regarding the intimacy between Lincoln and Bishop Simpson, see testimony of Gen. C. B. Fisk—Crook's Life of Simpson, pp. 273-274. Also the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War." Sweet, pp. 154-157.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of Bishop Simpson to his wife, quoted in Crooks' Life of Simpson, p. 387.

In 1864, he delivered this lecture at Elmira, New York, and a college president who heard it stated afterwards that "the government should employ that man to visit all the principal cities in the loyal states and pronounce that discourse; it would bring down the price of gold."<sup>1</sup> Harper's Weekly thus describes the effect of this lecture, which he delivered in Pittsburgh in October, 1864. "The effect of his discourse is described as very remarkable. Toward the close an eyewitness says: 'Laying his hand upon the torn and ball-ridden colors of the Seventy-third Ohio, he spoke of the battlefields, where they had been baptized in blood, and described their beauty as some small patch of azure, filled with stars that an angel had snatched from the heavenly canopy to set the stripes in blood.' With this description began a scene that Demosthenes might have envied. All over the vast assembly, handkerchiefs and hats were waved and before the speaker sat down the whole throng arose as if by magic influence, and screamed and shouted, and stamped and clapped, and wept and laughed in wild excitement. Colonel Moody, a Methodist preacher who was Colonel of the Seventy-fourth Ohio, sprang to the top of a bench and called for the 'Star Spangled Banner,' which was sung, or rather shouted, until the audience dispersed."<sup>2</sup>

This great speech of Bishop Simpson's played a rather important part in the Campaign of 1864. It was arranged to have the lecture delivered in New York, just before the presidential election. Mr. Ward Hoyt, who had the preparation for the meeting in charge, thus writes to Bishop Simpson: "All your friends agree that you should speak before the election. Speaking at that time, with the full report, promised in the Tribune, Times, Herald, and Evening Post, is equivalent to speaking to the nation." The speech was accordingly delivered on November 3rd, 1864, in the Academy of Music, New York. Of the great mass of people who came to hear it, the New York Tribune says: "Such an audience gathered at the Academy of Music as seldom, or never before, was crowded within its walls. Long before the time announced for the lecture to commence, the spacious building was crowded from pit to dome; the

<sup>1</sup> Western Christian Advocate, Aug. 31, 1864.

<sup>2</sup> "Harper's Weekly," Oct. 15, 1865, p. 659. Colonel Moody, referred to in the above quotation, was a Methodist minister from southern Ohio, and was Colonel of an Ohio Regiment. He was a rough and ready preacher and a gallant officer.

seats were soon filled, the standing room all taken up, and still the crowd poured in, until no more room was left in which to squeeze another person."<sup>1</sup>

With the above facts before us, it becomes clear why this Methodist Bishop should have had such an important part in the funeral of President Lincoln.

Before the body of the president left Washington, brief and simple services were conducted in the East room of the White House. The Rev. Dr. Hall, of the Church of the Epiphany, read the burial service; Bishop Simpson, as Nicolay and Hay says, "distinguished equally for his eloquence and his patriotism," offered prayer, and Dr. P. D. Gurley, at whose church (Presbyterian) the president and his family habitually attended worship, delivered a short address, "commemorating the qualities of courage, purity, and sublime faith, which had made the dead man great and useful."<sup>2</sup> At the close of this service the body was taken to the funeral train, and the long, sad journey from Washington to Springfield was begun.

I will not stop here to describe at length the scenes which took place at the various stops along the route. The body was viewed by thousands at Baltimore and Harrisburg; at Philadelphia it lay in state in Independence Hall; at New York, among the thousands who came to look upon the wrinkled face of the dead president, was General Scott, pale and feeble; at Syracuse, 30,000 people came out in a storm at midnight to pay their respects to the great dead; at Cleveland a special building was erected in the public square for the lying-in-state, and as the train neared the old home, the crowds increased. At Columbus, Ohio, and at Indianapolis, "the whole of each state seemed to be gathered to meet their dead hero,"<sup>3</sup> and at Chicago practically the whole city passed in one long, mournful stream past his open bier.

On Wednesday, May the 3rd, at 9 A. M., the funeral train reached Springfield, arriving at the Chicago and Alton station. The body was taken immediately to the Hall of Representatives in the State House, the walls of the room being decorated with such mottoes as "Sooner than surrender this principle I would be assassinated on the spot!" and "Washington the Father,

<sup>1</sup> New York Tribune," Nov. 7, 1864. Quoted in Crook's Life of Simpson, pp. 378-79.

<sup>2</sup> Nicolay and Hay—Lincoln, vol. x, pp. 317-318.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. 319-322.

Lincoln the Savior of his country."<sup>1</sup> Here the body lay in state, to be viewed by his old friends and neighbors until the next (Thursday) morning. The coffin, in which the dead president was encased, was of mahogany, lined with lead, the inside covered with white box-plaited satin, and was said to be the most beautiful and costly coffin ever manufactured in this country. The outside of the coffin was covered with rich, black cloth, heavily fringed with silver, and on each side four silver medallions, in which were the four silver handles. A silver plate bearing the following inscription was placed on the center of the lid:

### ABRAHAM LINCOLN

SIXTEENTH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

BORN FEBRUARY 12, 1809

DIED APRIL 15, 1865<sup>2</sup>

For days before the body reached Springfield, all trains coming into the little city were crowded with people coming from Illinois and other neighboring states, to pay their last respects to their dead chieftain, and while the body lay in state, thousands of people passed by his coffin, and great crowds visited the Lincoln home. The house was then occupied by Mr. Tilton, president of the Great Western Railroad, and his family very kindly showed the strangers through the rooms made sacred by Lincoln's presence and use. Finally, however, the crowds around the house became so numerous, it was found necessary to place a guard around the house to prevent depredations. Permission had been given the visitors to carry away a leaf or a flower as a souvenir, but many were not content with this and chipped off pieces of the fence, and one man was caught in the act of carrying away a brick from the wall.

Visitors were also shown the old Lincoln house-dog, and "old Tom," the family horse, the latter occupying a conspicuous place in the funeral procession, led by two grooms and caparisoned with velvet cloth. He had been sold some time previously, and had been used as a drayhorse, until the assassination, when he was purchased by two speculators for five hundred dollars, with the intention of showing him throughout the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Western Christian Advocate, May 10, 1865.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

There were others who attempted to turn the occasion into a means for financial profit, by taking photographs of the house, horse and dog and selling them to the thousands on the streets.<sup>1</sup>

Thursday, May the Fourth, 1865, dawned clear and beautiful, the day on which the closing funeral honors to the dead president were to take place. At noon of that day, a salute to the dead of twenty-one guns was fired, and afterwards single guns at intervals of ten minutes. About noon the remains were brought from the State House and placed in the hearse, which was surmounted by a magnificent crown of flowers. While this was taking place, a great chorus<sup>2</sup> sang the hymn from the portico of the capitol:

Children of the Heavenly King,  
As we journey let us sing,  
Sing our Saviour's worthy praise,  
Glorious in his works and ways.

We are traveling home to God,  
In the way our fathers trod;  
They are happy now, and we  
Soon their happiness shall see.

O ye banished seed, be glad;  
Christ our Advocate is made;  
Us to save our flesh assumes,  
Brother to our souls becomes.

Lord, obediently we'll go,  
Gladly leaving all below;  
Only thou our leader be,  
And we still will follow thee.<sup>3</sup>

The chief marshal of the day was Major General Hooker, aided by Brigadier-General Cook and staff, and Brigadier-General Oakes and staff. Among those who followed the hearse to the grave, besides the relatives and family friends (Mrs. Lincoln was not physically able to go), were Judge Davis of the United States Supreme Court, six or seven governors of states, members of Congress and other distinguished men, and an immense multitude of others.

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<sup>1</sup> Western Christian Advocate, May 17, 1865.

<sup>2</sup> Chorus led by Prof. B. Meissner,

<sup>3</sup> Christian Advocate and Journal (New York) May 11, 1865.

The procession reached Oak Ridge cemetery at about a quarter to one o'clock. The coffin was taken reverently from the hearse, and placed in the tomb, a stone structure built in a hill-side, and nearby in the same vault was the body of little Willie, whom the dead president had loved so dearly. When this was done the services began, in the presence of the great multitude gathered around. Prayer was offered by the Rev. Albert Hale, which was followed by a dirge, composed for the occasion by G. W. Root of Chicago. Then Rev. N. W. Miner read selections from the first chapter of John's Gospel, after which a choral was sung by a great choir, seated on a platform built for the occasion. After the reading of the dead president's second Inaugural by Rev. A. C. Hubbard, one of the noblest state papers of all time, Bishop Simpson gave the funeral oration, which Nicolay and Hay characterize as pathetic. At its close, there was a requiem, then the benediction, the services closing with a funeral dirge, composed by the Rev. Dr. Gurley, the president's pastor.

It will be impossible here to give Bishop Simpson's address in full, but my intention in writing this paper would not be fulfilled without giving at least some extracts from it. Accordingly I here append something of this address:<sup>1</sup>

"Fellow citizens of Illinois, and of many parts of our entire Union: Near the capital of this large and growing State of Illinois, in the midst of this beautiful grove, and at the open mouth of the vault which has just received the remains of our fallen chieftain, we gather to pay a tribute of respect and drop the tears of sorrow. A little more than four years ago he left his plain and quiet home in yonder city, receiving the parting words of the concourse of friends who, in the midst of the droppings of a gentle shower, gathered round him. He spoke of the pain in leaving the place where his children had been born, and where his home had been rendered so pleasant by many recollections. And as he left he made an earnest request in the hearing of some who are present at this hour, that as he was about to enter upon responsibilities which he believed to be greater than those which had fallen upon any man since the days of Washington, the people would offer up their prayers that God would aid and sus-

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<sup>1</sup> The address may be found in full in "The Christian Advocate and Journal" (New York) May 11, 1865. Lengthy extracts from the address may also be found in Crook's Life of Simpson, pp. 397-403; also in "The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War," Sweet, pp. 214-218.



tain him in the work they had given him to do. His company left your city; but as it went, snares were set for the Chief Magistrate. Scarcely did he escape the dangers of the way or the hand of the assassin as he neared Washington. I believe he escaped only through the vigilance of the officers and the prayers of the people, so that the blow was suspended for more than four years, which was at last permitted, through the providence of God, to fall.

“How different the occasion which witnessed his departure from that which witnessed his return! Doubtless you expected to take by the hand, to feel the warm grasp which you felt in other days, and to see the tall form among you which you had delighted to honor in years past. But he was never permitted to return until he came with lips mute, his frame encoffined, and a weeping nation following. Such a scene as his return to you was never witnessed. Among the events of history there have been great processions of mourners. There was one for the Patriarch Jacob, which went out of Egypt, and the Canaanites wondered at the evidence of reverence and filial affection which came from the hearts of the Israelites. There were mourners when Moses fell upon the heights of Pisgah and was hid from human view. There has been mourning in the kingdoms of the earth when kings and princes have fallen. But never was there in the history of man such mourning as that which has attended this progress to the grave. If we look at the multitudes that followed him we can see how the Nation stood aghast when it heard of his death. Tears filled the eyes of manly, sunburned faces. Strong men as they grasped the hands of their friends, were unable to find vent for their grief in words. Women and children caught up the tidings as they ran through the land, and were melted into tears. The Nation stood still. Men left their plows in the fields and asked what the end should be. The hum of manufactories ceased, and the sound of the hammer was not heard. Busy merchants closed their doors, and in the exchange gold passed no more from hand to hand. Though three weeks have elapsed, the Nation has scarcely breathed easily. Men of all political parties and all religious creeds have united in paying this tribute. The Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church in New York and a Protestant minister walked side by side in the sad procession, and a Jewish rabbi performed a part of the solemn service. Here too are members of civic professions, with men and women from the humblest as well as

from the highest occupations. Here and there, too, are tears—as sincere and warm as any that drop—which come from the eyes of those whose kindred and whose race have been freed from their chains by him whom they mourn as their deliverer. More races have looked on the procession for sixteen hundred miles—by night and by day, by sunlight, dawn, at twilight, and by torchlight—than ever before watched the progress of a procession on its way to the grave.

“A part of this deep interest has arisen from the times in which we live and in which he who has fallen was a leading actor. It is a principle of our nature that, feelings once excited, turn readily from the object by which they are aroused to some other object, which may for the time being, take possession of the mind. Another law of our nature is that our deepest affections gather about some human form in which are incarnated the living thoughts of an age. If we look then at the times, we see an age of excitement.” These thoughts were by the Bishop copiously illustrated.

“The tidings came that Richmond was evacuated, and that Lee had surrendered. The bells rang merrily all over the land. The booming of cannon was heard; illuminations and torchlight processions manifested the general joy, and families looked for the speedy return of their loved ones from the field. Just in the midst of this in one hour—nay in one moment—the news was flashed throughout the land that Abraham Lincoln had perished by the hand of an assassin; and then all the feeling which had gathered for four years, in forms of excitement, grief horror, joy, turned into one wail of woe—a sadness inexpressible. But it is not the character of the times, merely, which has made this mourning; the mode of his death must be taken into account. Had he died with kind friends around him; had the sweat of death been wiped from his brow by gentle hands while he was yet conscious—how it would have softened or assuaged something of our grief! But no moment of warning was given to him or to us. He was stricken down, too, when his hopes for the end of the rebellion were bright, and prospects for a calmer life were before him. There was a cabinet meeting that day, said to have been the most cheerful of any held since the beginning of the rebellion. After this meeting he talked with his friends, and spoke of the four years of tempest, of the storm being over, and of the four years of content now awaiting him, as the weight of care and anxiety would be taken from his mind. In the midst of these anticipations he left his house, never to return

alive. The evening was Good Friday, the saddest day in the whole calendar for the Christian Church. So filled with grief was every Christian heart, that even the joyous thoughts of Easter Sunday failed to remove the sorrow under which the true worshipper bowed in the house of God.

"But the chief reason for this mourning is to be found in the man himself." And here follows a summary of the character of Lincoln, in which the Bishop tells of his early life and self-training; he speaks of his administration, of his religious life, and finally of his home life, referring to Mrs. Lincoln, who was unable to be present at the grave, and also to Robert Lincoln, who was standing near. Of Lincoln's goodness, he says: "Abraham Lincoln was a good man. He was known as an honest, temperate, forgiving man, a just man, a man of noble heart, in every way. Certainly, if there ever was a man who illustrated some of the principles of pure religion, that man was our departed President. His example urges the country to trust in God and do right.

"Standing as we do by his coffin today, let us resolve to carry forward the policy which he so nobly began. Let us do right to all men. Let us vow, before heaven, to eradicate every vestige of human slavery; to give every human being his true position before God and man; to crush every form of rebellion, and to stand by the flag which God has given us. How joyful that it floated over parts of every State before Mr. Lincoln's career was ended! How singular that to the fact of the assassin's heel being caught in the folds of the flag we are probably indebted for his capture. The time will come when, in the beautiful words of him whose lips are now forever sealed, 'The mystic chords of memory, which stretch from every battlefield and from every patriot's grave, shall yield a sweeter music when touched by the angels of our better nature.'

"Chieftain, farewell! The Nation mourns thee. Mothers shall teach thy name to their lisping children. The youth of our land shall emulate thy virtues. Statesmen shall study thy record and from it learn lessons of wisdom. Mute though thy lips be, yet they still speak. Hushed is thy voice, but echoes of liberty are ringing through the world, and the sons of bondage listen with joy. Thou didst fall not for thyself. The assassin had no hate for thee. Our hearts were aimed at; our national life was sought. We crown thee as our martyr, and humanity enthrones thee as her triumphant son. Hero, Martyr, Friend, Farewell!"